

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES—Tuesday, May 1, 2001

The House met at 12:30 p.m.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Mr. Monahan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 560. An act for the relief of Rita Mirembé Revell (a.k.a. Margaret Rita Mirembé).

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 3, 2001, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member except the majority leader, the minority leader or the minority whip limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. FRANK) for 5 minutes.

INVESTIGATION OF CIVILIANS ON NAVY SHIPS CALLED FOR

Mr. FRANK. Mr. Speaker, the terrible tragedy that led to the loss of Japanese lives when one of our submarines surfaced and crashed into a ship obviously consists of the loss of those lives and the trauma of the other people involved, both on the submarine and on the Japanese trawler. But there is another disturbing aspect of that, although it is, of course, far less disturbing than the loss of life. But we cannot do anything about the loss of life. However, we can do something as a House of Representatives, which we are not doing, about the kind of circumstances that led to that.

It is clear that those lives would not have been lost were it not for the Navy's program of bringing civilians along on military activities for the purposes of lobbying the Congress of the United States. Now, that is true at one level without debate. That submarine would not have left port if it were not for the need to take 16 apparently well-connected, politically influential civilians for a ride. As the New York Times points out, that purpose was to build support among these civilians so they will lobby the Congress for more money.

In addition to the excursion for the 16 civilians being the sole reason for

that particular submarine going out, we have questions that the Navy refused to even ask, and certainly to have answered, about the extent to which the 16 civilians on board a very crowded submarine might have contributed to the terrible tragedy.

We have a commander who was ordered to take the submarine out for the purpose of giving the 16 civilians a ride, who has ended his career. That is a sad thing. He appears to have been a very able, very dedicated man. We have other sailors who may be disciplined.

No one appears to be dealing with the policy by which the Navy sent those people into that difficult situation, surfacing the submarine in an area where ships would be around, with 16 civilians present, and the investigation conducted by the Navy which led ultimately to the resignation of the commander appeared designed not to get to the bottom of these questions.

As the New York Times reported on April 22, one of the sailors who had initially indicated that the presence of the civilians was a problem, changed his testimony. Indeed, it appeared that the pressure was on him from the Navy to change his testimony. "It was very dramatic, recalled Jay Fidell, a lawyer and former Coast Guard judge who followed the proceedings as a commentator for the Public Broadcasting System," the New York Times reports. "There was this long pause, and then he said 'no'" to the question about whether or not the civilians had interfered. He previously said "yes."

What bothers me now is that this House of Representatives, with oversight responsibilities, appears to be ignoring what went on in that situation. The policy of the Navy of scheduling trips solely for the edification of civilians in the hope that they will become political lobbyists appears to be nothing we are going to challenge.

I do not think any other agency in the Federal Government guilty of this practice would be let off so easy. We are told that we do not have enough money in the budget for training missions, but we had enough money in the budget for a mission that had nothing to do with training, was not required for training, but was required to show off for 16 civilians.

We do not know who the 16 civilians were. Were they contributors? I did not think it was a good idea to let contributors sleep in the Lincoln bedroom under President Clinton. But we did not build the Lincoln bedroom solely to let them sleep there. We did not un-

dergo any expenses to let them sleep there.

Letting people sleep in the Lincoln bedroom seems to me to have probably less of a negative impact than sending out a submarine into waters where there are civilian ships, just to make 16 civilians happy. I would rather those 16 civilians have got 16 nights in the Lincoln bedroom than to have a submarine go out there.

Now, it is no one's fault that this led to the loss of life. No one wanted that to happen. Everyone is genuinely sad. A career of a very distinguished officer has, unfortunately, been lost to this. But we did allow a submarine to go out there, knowing that this is a dangerous thing.

So I hope my colleagues in the House with supervisory responsibilities will look into this policy. I believe we ought to say to the Navy, look, it is one thing if you let people observe something that is going to be happening anyway; but scheduling complicated military events, potentially dangerous ones, just so you can show off to people who will become political lobbyists? Do not do that anymore.

[From The New York Times, Apr. 23, 2001]
DESPITE SUB INQUIRY, NAVY STILL SEES NEED FOR GUESTS ON SHIPS

(By John Kifner)

HONOLULU, APR. 23, 2001.—The Navy's inquiry into the submarine Greenville's collision with a Japanese fisheries training vessel has sidestepped one factor in the fatal crash: a program hugely popular with the Navy brass in which thousands of civilians, many wealthy or influential, are invited on excursions aboard warships in hopes of bolstering support for the services and, ultimately, their financing.

Adm. Thomas B. Fargo, the commander of the Pacific Fleet, acting on the report of a three-admiral court of inquiry, is expected to recommend a review of the visitors program and suggest a few rules—some of which were already in place and violated by the Greenville—but the program is regarded as so vital, not only by the Navy but by all the services that it is likely to continue virtually unchanged, military officials say. "There is very strong support for this departmentwide," a Navy official at the Pentagon said. "There is no chance that bringing civilians to Navy units is going to stop. By no means."

The role of the visitors program in the accident that killed nine people aboard the Japanese vessel, the Ehime Maru, on Feb. 9 is still unclear for several reasons:

The court of inquiry was convened specifically because it was one of the few military panels that could compel civilian testimony, but one of the 16 civilians aboard the submarine were called before it.

The chairman of the panel, Vice Adm. John B. Nathman, said that part of his

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.